

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

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NRO

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Disposition of CIA Covert U-2 Reconnaissance Program

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NRO

I am informed that in a meeting with Budget Director Mayo on 17 December 1969 you expressed your intention of terminating the CIA covert U-2 reconnaissance program.

The continuation or termination of the CIA U-2 program was a question I had intended to raise in the 303 Committee before it unexpectedly arose in your meeting with Mr. Mayo.

The CIA forwarded a memorandum dated 18 December to the 303 Committee recommending retention of this activity for the following reasons. This memorandum is attached at Tab A.

1. The program provides a flexible overhead reconnaissance system with unique capabilities for high resolution photography, ELINT collection. It can react rapidly to worldwide crisis situations cheaply, effectively and at little political risk to the U.S. Government.

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3. This new U-2R capability can be utilized with a reaction time of approximately 50 hours anywhere in the world and has a very high degree of survivability if attacked by either MIG-21's or SAM's.

4. This program provides the U.S. Government with a low cost option for meeting future crisis situations in areas other than the more heavily defended areas of the USSR. The vulnerability of satellites makes this option especially desirable, particularly when it is recognized that neutralization of satellites would deny the U.S. a high percentage of its strategic intelligence.

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NSC REVIEW COMPLETED, 10/31/04

NRO review(s) completed.

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5. During noncrisis periods this asset is used to collect intelligence on Communist China [REDACTED]

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6. The SAC U-2's do not now have adequate sensors for all types of missions, lack the defensive equipment to operate in a hostile environment and of course do not afford the U.S. Government the option of nonattributability.

On 20 December the members of the 303 Committee, with the exception of Mr. Packard, who was out of the city, discussed this activity in depth. It was the strong view of those present that the U.S. should retain this covert reconnaissance capability for contingency use in possible future crisis situations. Should future events dictate the necessity for resumption of covert overflights of the Chinese Communist mainland, this mechanism would be available.

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The combined NRO and CIA budget which enables the CIA to operate and maintain this covert reconnaissance capability is on the order of [REDACTED]

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The Committee believes that savings resulting from termination or transfer of this activity would be slight compared to the loss of the covert capability [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] resulting therefrom. The Committee would like to study and review further the feasibilities of continuing or terminating or transferring this activity and make appropriate recommendations to you before the next budget submission.

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RECOMMENDATION:

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That you approve retention of the CIA covert U-2 reconnaissance program with a budget on the order of [REDACTED] for FY 1971, with the understanding that the 303 Committee will study this activity further and make appropriate recommendations to you prior to the FY 1972 budget submission.

Attachment  
Tab A

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APPROVE [Signature]

DISAPPROVE \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

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18 December 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: 303 Committee

SUBJECT: Recommendation for Retention of the CIA IDEALIST Program

1. The Agency U-2 program provides the U.S. a flexible overhead reconnaissance system with unique capabilities for high resolution (9 inch) photography, elint collection, [REDACTED]. The system can react rapidly to world-wide crisis situations cheaply, effectively, and at little political risk to the U.S. Government,

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2. The Agency has developed a specialized organization and methodology for effectively carrying out covert U-2 operations unattributable to U.S. Government sponsorship. [REDACTED]

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This U-2 capability can be utilized on short notice with a reaction

time of approximately fifty hours anywhere in the world.

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3. This program provides the U.S. Government with a low cost option for meeting future crisis situations in areas other than the more heavily defended areas of the Soviet Union. The vulnerability of satellites makes such an option especially desirable, particularly when it is recognized that neutralization of these vehicles would deny this country a high percentage of its strategic intelligence.

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The program assets (airplanes, major equipment and

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facilities) are now paid for. The Agency program as now envisioned is projected to cost approximately [ ] including NRO and CIA funds.

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4. Agency U-2R's have a mission altitude capability of [ ] feet and a maximum range of 5850 miles, at a speed of [ ] The standard camera configuration provides for a swath width of 63 n.m. with 2300 n.m. of coverage in the flight direction. [ ]

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[ ] They are the only covert reconnaissance vehicles in the NRO inventory. SAC aircraft of similar type do not now have adequate sensors for all missions and lack the defensive equipment to operate in a hostile environment. The SAC U-2's do not afford this government the option of non-attributability.

5. It is the opinion of CIA that the availability of this flexible, quick reaction capability for covert reaction to world-wide crises more than justifies the cost of retention. It is recognized that broad U.S. policy considerations must govern U-2 operations and decisions, especially as far as overflights of China are concerned. And it is true that for the past few years we have been reluctant to allow overflights

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even with covert manned aircraft. However, it is important to note that in times of crisis our attitude in this regard can change rapidly. It is for such contingencies that a covert capability like the U-2 would become very important to the President. If we terminate this program now, this option will be lost.

6. It is therefore recommended that Project IDEALIST be continued.

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